



Holiday Shopping



We will discuss:

- Online purchases
- Gift cards
- Credit vs. debit cards
- Holiday shopping safety
- Refunds, restocking, rebates



But first....a word from our sponsor

- South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs
- Mission: To protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education



Choosing an online business

- Know who you are dealing with!
- Identify the company's name, physical location, telephone numbers.
- Do your homework to be sure the company is legitimate: Google the name, contact SCDCA, contact consumer affairs where the business is located, contact the BBB.



Know what you are buying!

- Look for accurate, clear and easily accessible information about the goods or services being offered.
- Look for descriptions and read them carefully: size, quality, etc.
- Contact the company before placing an order if you have any questions.



Understand the terms, conditions and costs

- Look for any restrictions, limitations or conditions of the purchase, instructions for proper use.
- Look for return or refund policies, if cancellation is an option, warranties or guarantees.



Online payment

- Check out the company's security policies.
- Be sure to use a secure browser that encrypts your personal and financial information.
- NEVER email your financial information!



Watch out for your privacy!

- Find out what the business will do with your personal and financial information after the transaction is complete.
- Does the business share its information with other businesses?
- Look at the privacy policy – if they have an “opt-out” clause, use it!



Refund or returns; delivery dates

- Can you return the item if you change your mind? If you can, who pays shipping? Is there a restocking fee?
- If the item is a gift, can the recipient return or exchange it?
- When can you expect to receive your order?



BEWARE

- Be wary if the company asks for financial information prior to placement of the order – especially via a “pop up” ad.
- Look for words such as refurbished, vintage or close-out.
- Brand name items with “too good to be true” prices may be counterfeits.



Payment

- **DO NOT send cash!**
- **Pay with a credit card** – NOT a debit card!
- Credit transactions are protected by the *Fair Credit Billing Act* that provides a right to dispute charges in certain circumstances.
- Also, if the card is used without your permission, generally liable for no more than \$50.



Be sure to

- Print and save the record of your online transaction, including a product description and price, any emails to or from the seller, the online receipt.
- Print and save a copy of any warranty or guarantee, pertinent policies.



Internet Auctions

- Usually individual sellers or small businesses sell items directly to consumers. The host site (example – eBay) does not take responsibility for the merchandise.
- Before bidding, be sure to read the Terms and Conditions, FAQs, what payment options are available, etc.



BOTTOM LINE

- BEFORE you order anything online, check out the business!
- Use alternate methods to verify information!
- Understand all policies before making a purchase!
- Use a credit card when making purchases over the internet!
- Be vigilant – review your bank statements and credit cards bills!
- Keep your computer up-to-date and protected!



Gift Cards

- It is illegal to sell a gift card that expires in less than a year unless the expiration date is printed on the card in 10-point type and in capital letters.
- If gift certificate fails to clearly state expiration date, then it is valid for one year.
- Any other conditions (declining values or extra fees) must be printed on the card, its envelope or any other covering. If not clearly
- marked, no fees may be changed.



Gift Card Scams

- Scammers steal the account numbers off the back of gift cards before they are purchased. The scammer calls the 800 number provided on the back of the card to check the balance on the activated card. The scammer then uses the account number to purchase items, and before the buyer has time to give the gift card to friends or family, the balance is zero.



Protect Yourself and Your Purchase

- Shoppers should be cautious of gift cards on display in discount, convenience, and grocery stores. Gift cards purchased through specialty and department stores and restaurants, however, require the buyer to request a gift card from the cashier. The account numbers on these cards are typically a more secure option. Additionally, consumers should use cards that have PINs or other another required code before the card can be used.



Credit Cards and Debit Cards

- Credit Card
 - You borrow money from the card issuer
 - Interest – sometimes quite high
 - Late fees, over limit fees
 - Cash back/rebates
 - Additional warranties
 - Protections – Fair Credit Billing Act
 - Help to establish credit if used responsibly



Tips for Using Credit Cards

- Do not charge more than you can pay in full at the end of the month!
- Only carry the card if you plan on using it
- Weigh the “reward” program with interest and fees you will have to pay!
- Use it to purchase consumer electronics IF you get an additional warranty **and** IF you can pay in full at the end of the month!



Debit Cards

- Almost the same as a check
- PIN vs. signature
- Blocking
- Better as a means to budget spending
- Some have “rewards” programs



When To Use A...

- Debit Card:
 - Cash and carry purchases
 - Getting cash
- Credit Card:
 - Over the internet
 - Personal electronics
 - When you can pay in full when the bill is due



Other Shopping Issues

- **Keep track of your spending.** Incidental and impulse purchases add up. Jot down what you spend after every purchase.
- **Save your receipts.** You need them for returns and exchanges. Check credit and debit card sales and return receipts against your monthly bills and statements, and report any problems to the credit card issuer promptly.
- **Ask for gift receipts.** Many retailers offer gift receipts that code the price. That way, if the recipient returns the item, they'll get the same value even if the item has been discounted further.
- **Ask about refund and return policies.** Many merchants may have different refund and return policies for sale items. For example, clearance merchandise may be on final sale, meaning no refunds or exchanges.



Be A Smart Shopper

Shop around. A “sale” price isn’t always the “best” price. Some merchants may offer a sale price on the item you want for a limited time; other merchants may offer items at a discount everyday.

Read sale ads carefully. Some ads may say “quantities limited,” “no rain checks,” or “not available at all stores.” Before you step out the door, call to make sure the item you want is in stock.

Consider your time and travel costs. If an item is on sale, but the store is across town, include your time and the costs of transportation and parking in the price.

Look for price-matching policies. Some merchants will match, or even beat, a competitor’s prices.

Go online. Check out websites that compare prices. If you decide to buy from an online merchant, keep shipping costs and delivery time in mind.



More Ideas

Carefully consider bargain offers that are based on purchases of additional merchandise. For example, “Buy One, Get One Free” or “Free Gift with Purchase.” If you don’t really want or need the item, it’s not a deal.

Clip coupons. Coupons are useful when they save you money on what you’re already planning to buy. Check coupons for any restrictions. For example, do expiration dates apply, or do you have to spend a certain amount before you can use the coupon? Some retailers will accept expired coupons, and even coupons from their competitors. Check with the retailer before you leave home to learn their policy.

Ask about sale adjustments. If you buy an item at regular price and it goes on sale the next week, can you get a credit or refund for the discounted amount?



More Ideas

- **Keep good records.** Whether you're ordering by mail, phone, or online, it's important to keep detailed information about the transaction, including your order number, shipping costs and dates, warranties, and refund and return policies. Some online merchants do not process returns at their retail locations.
- **Ship early.** If you're sending gifts to out-of-towners, factor in extra time for shipping. If you wait until the last minute, you may pay a hefty price for express or overnight shipping.
- **Keep an eye on your wallet.** Don't flash cash. Keep an eye on your credit or debit card during transactions, and get them back as quickly as possible. If your cards are lost or stolen, report the loss or theft immediately to the card issuers.



Refunds

- No absolute right to return items
- Learn store policy **before** the purchase
- Keep receipts and other documents



Restocking Fees

- Some stores are retaining some of the purchase price to cover costs
- Generally – electronics, large ticket items
- 10 – 20 % of purchase price



Rebates

- Understand what you have to buy and what you get as the rebate
- FOLLOW ALL RULES for the rebate
- Keep copies of all paperwork



Online Legal Research

- South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs: www.scconsumer.gov
- South Carolina State Code: <http://www.scstatehouse.net/code/statmast.htm>
- National Consumer Law Center: <http://www.nclc.org/>
- Consumer World: <http://www.consumerworld.org/>
- Federal Trade Commission: <http://www.ftc.gov/consumer>



Other Resources

<http://www.naca.net/>

<http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/>

<http://www.blawg.com/>

www.scambusters.org

www.internetfraud.usdoj.gov

www.onguardonline.gov



And.....

- <http://money.cnn.com/>
- <http://moneycentral.msn.com/home.asp>
- www.bankrate.com
- <http://www.responsiblelending.org/>